



Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society

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President's Message

January is a busy month for the St. Lucie Audubon Society.

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count in St. Lucie County will take place on Saturday, January 2, 2010. We need ten teams of three persons each to cover the assigned areas. Over 10,500 birds (117 species) were counted last year. We need your help. Please participate, contact this year's Coordinator Camille S. Yates at 772-971-9798 or Camille@esyfreelance.com.

The annual St. Lucie Audubon Bird Watching Classes are scheduled for January 14, 21, & 28, 2010 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Oxbow Eco Center. Winter is a great time to see birds in Florida. If you want to attract and identify backyard birds, or learn how, where and when to go looking for birds, the 3 classes and 3 field

trips in January will help you get started. You will also learn about binoculars, bird calls, and migration. Florida has over 450 species listed and our instructor Billi Wagner has seen 334 of them, so far. She has been a birdwatcher for over 20 years. Contact Liz Dunleavy at 772-489-9050 or DunZippy@aol.com to sign up for the class.

The field trip scheduled for January 9, 2010 is to one of the very best birding sites in Florida, Merritt Island Wetlands, Titusville. Hart and Jewel Rufe will lead.

Take advantage of all these opportunities. Attend our meetings and get a friend to join. Remember to renew your membership.

Thank you for your support.

Dan Walma

Calendar of Events

January Field Trip

Merritt Island NWR is one of the best birding areas in the state, and again Hart & Jewel Rufe will be our leaders for this trip! We will meet at the Home Depot parking lot in Fort Pierce (Okeechobee Road) around 6:15 a.m. Be ready to leave the parking lot NO LATER THAN 6:30 a.m. We'll take I-95 and will meet Hart & Jewel at the McDonalds once we get off our exit. Hart & Jewel know Merritt Island well...they plan on probable stops at the Parrish Park area and the Pumping Station dike, followed by a tour around Black Point Drive and then the Fee Station to hopefully spot Florida Scrub Jays. Bring your own lunch and beverages. There will be more details at the January 7th meeting. Any questions contact Dorothy at 349-6025.

The Indian River Lagoon Coalition has scheduled a meeting for January 23rd. The meeting will be held in the library of the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory in Vero Beach and will start at 10:30 a.m. and will be completed by 3 p.m. Lunch will be available. Items to be discussed include the Florida Department of Environmental Protection water quality program known as the Basin Management Action Plan for the Indian River

Lagoon. We will also be talking about content and funding matters related to the IRLagoon.com website. We will also have an update on the Oslo Road parking and channel dredging project.

Saturday, January 23, 2010 there will be a "Party in the Park" at the Fort Pierce Inlet State Park from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Saturday, February 20, 2010 is the Bud Adams Ranch Breakfast and Tour from 8 a.m. - 11 a.m. \$25 per person. Start the morning out with a nice full hot breakfast and take a tour of an actual working cattle ranch in Fort Pierce. The tour gives you a chance to see birds, scenery and an opportunity to see a different side of Florida life that still exists. You will also get some history of the Bud Adams Ranch and business along with other wildlife that they see at the ranch.

Please help support your local Audubon chapter by coming out to our annual fundraiser at the Bud Adams Ranch. If you have any friends and family members that might also be interested in this tour, let them know that they do not have to be a member to attend this event. Please call 772-924-8778 to reserve your seats.

January Meeting: January 7, 2010 Speaker Deryl Young Master Gardener with the County Extension Office
Meeting Place: Oxbow Eco-Center • 5400 NE St. James Drive, Pt. St. Lucie, FL 34983
Located 1.5 miles south of Midway Road • 1.5 miles north of Airoso

www.stlucieaudubon.org

Report on December 5 Field Trip to Everglades National Park

15 members made a day-long exploration of ENP , where we identified 48 bird species on an over-cast day...some rain, but dry most of the day. 1st stop after the Visitor Center, was the Anhinga Trail, where there was a welcoming committee of about 50 vultures in the parking lot that had an unfortunate attraction to our cars. Anhinga Trail lived up to it's reputation...LOTS of Aningas, Cormorants, numerous waders including Green Herons that were seen at every turn....and the American Alligator of course!. Palm Warblers and Eastern Phoebes seen here too, among other species.

Next, we drove down to Flamingo....many wading birds seen in the flats along the drive, along with perching Red-Shouldered Hawks. Brief stop at Mrazek Pond on the way yielded more waders, including immature Black Night Heron. The Flamingo area had the White Pelicans, Brown Pelican, several Tern species offshore ...on shore we saw

(among other species) Osprey, Loggerhead Shrikes and Black and White Warbler. Brief stop at Eco Pond produced Woodstorks, waders and an elusive Roseate Spoonbill.

Next stop was Paurotis Pond , where the rain was coming down and not a bird in sight. We shot over to Mahoghany Hammock, walked through the dense hammock in light rain, which luckily stopped at the end of the trail. We saw Northern Flickers, Pileated Woodpecker, and other species as the sun came back out.

Last stop was Pa-hay-o-kee....beautiful vistas along the walk....waders seen, and a Northern Harrier and Snail Kite were seen in this area.

After leaving the Park, several of us stopped at the "Robert is Here" fruit/veggie stand for some culinary exploration ! Long day, but well-enjoyed! For many it was their 1st time in the Everglades, and hopefully not their last!

*** SPONSORS WANTED ***

St. Lucie County has a new policy of charging Non-Profits for use of County facilities.

Our cost is \$45.00 per month payable in advance. We are looking for sponsors to underwrite the cost of using Oxbow-Eco-Center.

In return we will acknowledge individual or company names in our Newsletter several times during the ensuing year. If you are interested in sponsoring SLA's ongoing program please send checks to :

**ST. LUCIE AUDUBON,
P.O. BOX 12474,
FORT PIERCE, FL 34979**

**Thanks to the Following Sponsors
John and Nettie Brolman
Deena and Dana Wade - "River Lilly"
Ed Bowes & Ruth Neese
Treasure Coast Wildlife Center
Billi Wagner**

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ST.LUCIE AUDUBON SOCIETY 2009 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Webmaster	Mary Dodge	mary@jackmaryetc.com

Conservation Corner

Submitted by Ed Bowes

Someone in Wabasso is killing gopher tortoises for food, according to www.tcpalm.com. Equally disappointing is the conservation area affected is used to relocate gopher tortoises displaced by development. Members of St. Lucie Audubon have participated in relocating gopher tortoises, and it is disconcerting to hear that tortoises are being killed.

Gopher tortoises are a protected species in Florida, currently listed as threatened, but under review at the federal level for endangered status. Per Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) regulations, "No person shall take, attempt to take, pursue, hunt, harass, capture, possess, sell or transport any gopher tortoise or parts thereof or their eggs, or molest, damage, or destroy gopher tortoise burrows, except as authorized by Commission permit..." (<http://myfwc.com>). That statement covers events from children throwing rocks at gopher tortoises to poachers catching and killing the animals. Any human actions other than watching, photographing, or rescuing gopher tortoises are strictly prohibited. Violations are currently punishable by up to a \$5000 fine and five years in state prison.

State wildlife law does not single out gopher tortoises for special treatment—it is illegal to feed, harass, or harm any imperiled species in Florida. It is also illegal to feed any wild animal that could become a nuisance; this includes Sandhill cranes, raccoons, foxes, bears, and alligators. Feeding wildlife is considered a problem by FWC for four reasons:

1. It can negatively alter feeding behavior in some species and establish suboptimal nutrition.
2. It can habituate wildlife; make them too accustomed to people, which can place the animals or humans in danger.
3. It encourages animals to congregate, which assists the spread of diseases.
4. It is often done without thought, meaning humans feed wildlife "junk food" that has no nutritional val-

ue for the animals.

Harassing, harming, killing, illegal feeding, and any other wildlife law violation may be reported via the Wildlife Alert Reward System toll-free phone number The number is 1-888-404-3922 and is in operation 24 hours a day. Any information that leads to an arrest may be eligible for a reward. There are six FWC Law Enforcement regional offices and the Treasure Coast includes two regions. Indian River Co. is in the Northeast Region with a regional office located in Ocala (phone 352-732-1225). St. Lucie and Martin counties are in the South A Region with an office in West Palm Beach (phone 561-625-5122). Please report all known or suspected wildlife law violations—our remaining wildlife needs all the help we can give.

Membership Application

A one-year chapter membership extends from January to January. You may use the coupon below to begin or renew your membership.

SLAS is now offering a Chapter-only annual membership for those who want to financially support their local chapter. The following dues options apply:

- Individual: \$20 per year**
- Family: \$25 per year**
(for 2 or more people in same household)
- Sponsor: \$50 per year**
- Patron: \$100 per year**
- Lifetime: \$500**

Each local membership includes a subscription to the monthly newsletter "The Laughing Gull". You may receive "The Laughing Gull" via standard mail or electronically via email. Please indicate your preference below.

Please make checks payable to and send to:

St. Lucie Audubon Society, P.O. Box 12474,
Fort Pierce, FL 34979

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

New membership: _____ **Renewal:** _____

Please send my "Laughing Gull" by:

Email _____ or **Standard mail:** _____

Thanks for your support.

Feathered Friends

Submitted by Ruth Neese

Look at the buzzards! This phrase is often heard in Florida in the winter near landfills. The “buzzards” are Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), not real buzzards. The word “buzzard” actually refers to a group of Old World buteo hawks. Turkey Vultures are large birds with a bare red head, black body feathers, and a silvery-gray trailing edge on the flight feathers.

Turkey Vultures are members of nature’s clean-up crew, eating carrion of all sizes thereby reducing breeding grounds for disease. Turkey Vultures are notable for two things—their amazing sense of smell and their flight capabilities. Only two New World vultures have keen senses of smell, and the Turkey Vulture is at the top. These

birds can find carcasses under dense tree canopy by catching the scent from more than five miles away! Other carrion eaters, like Black Vultures and Crested Caracara then follow Turkey Vultures to the carcass.

Turkey Vultures are built for gliding on thermal updrafts; they seldom flap their wings unless it is absolutely necessary. Their wings are relatively wide with a wingspan averaging 6 feet. When seen soaring, the wings make a characteristic silhouette described as a dihedral. This means the wings are held at an upward angle relatively to the bird’s body. On the next windy day, look up and watch the Turkey Vultures swoop, wheel, and soar to altitudes we can only reach by plane.

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Conservation Corner

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